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Source: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Apr., 1973, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Apr., 1973), pp. 129-147

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/162238>

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Richard G. Hovannisian

ARMENIA AND THE CAUCASUS IN THE GENESIS OF THE SOVIET-TURKISH ENTENTE

ON 26 April 1920, three days after the opening of the Grand National Assembly in Angora (Ankara), Mustafa Kemal addressed his first officially confirmed message to the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) of Russia. Shortly thereafter, Bekir Sami Bey (Kundah), Turkish foreign minister, departed for negotiations in Moscow. A draft treaty was initialed in August and delivered to Angora in September, and in March 1921 the governments of the Turkish Grand National Assembly and of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic established formal bonds by concluding the Treaty of Moscow. During the few intervening months the small Caucasian Armenian republic, which had been created in May of 1918 and which had become the fulcrum of Armenian aspirations for an independent state encompassing both the Russian Armenian provinces and the contiguous Turkish Armenian provinces of eastern Anatolia, was crushed by the invasion of General Kâzım Karabekir's XV Army Corps.¹ The offensive, begun after attainment of a vague Soviet-Turkish understanding, not only overturned the Allied-imposed Treaty of Sèvres, which had awarded to the Armenian republic much of the four eastern vilayets of Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, and Erzurum, but also restored to Turkish dominion the sanjaks of Kars and Ardahan, since 1878 parts of Russian or Eastern Armenia. What was more, Nationalist Turkey annexed the Surmalu district, embracing Mount Ararat, the historic symbol of the Armenian people. The little that was left of Russian Armenia was transformed into a Soviet republic but minus the disputed districts of Nakhichevan and Karabagh, which through Turkish intercession were awarded to Azerbaijan. With these actions, the final barrier between Russia and Anatolia was lifted and the flow of Soviet financial and military assistance reached the Nationalist camp in time for the critical encounters with the Greek armies in Asia Minor.

This sequence of events has become clearly defined, in contrast with the precursory contacts that culminated in Mustafa Kemal's letter of 26 April and in

¹ For details on the formation of the Armenian republic, see Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967). A useful survey of events in the Caucasus between 1917 and 1921 is made by Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia* (Oxford, [1951]).

Foreign Commissar Grigorii V. Chicherin's swift, positive response. But on the basis of materials that have recently come to light, it is now possible to reconstruct in large measure the genesis of the Soviet–Nationalist entente and its bearing on Armenia and the Caucasus. Significantly, nearly every preliminary link was discovered by British intelligence agents and reported to London from Istanbul in the dispatches of the British High Commissioner and the so-called Army of the Black Sea.¹ Whereas previously the veracity of these reports might have been questioned or rejected outright, the revealing memoirs of Nationalist commanders such as Kâzım Karabekir and Ali Fuat (Cebesoy) and archival sources included of late in Soviet and Turkish publications serve to confirm that British intelligence had indeed penetrated the innermost circles of the Kemalist movement. Yet the tapping of highly guarded secrets in no way hindered the course of Soviet–Turkish relations. The intelligence summaries were dutifully read by clerks in London and filed in the proper portfolios. Until the time that Mustafa Kemal's letter was delivered in Moscow by General Halil Paşa (Kut), the Near Eastern experts dismissed the likelihood of a Bolshevik–Nationalist alliance, a combination about which Armenian spokesmen warned the Allied powers with monotonous regularity.²

From the beginning of the long struggle to thwart Allied plans to assign parts of Anatolia to Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, and even Frenchmen, the organizers of the Turkish resistance perceived the potential benefits of Soviet collaboration. Both countries were beset by foreign intervention, deep domestic division, and secessionist provinces. Hence, although each remained skeptical of the ideologies of the other, Nationalist Turkey and Soviet Russia were drawn toward mutual assistance. Even before the end of World War I, news of the Bolshevik revolution and of the Sovnarkom's denunciation of tsarist foreign policy had been greeted with guarded optimism in the Ottoman Empire. Lenin had long decried the Russian military occupation of the eastern vilayets and had vilified the secret wartime Entente pacts, one provision of which was to 'rob' Turkey of her Armenian provinces.³ On assuming power in November of 1917, the Sovnarkom caused a worldwide sensation by repudiating those pacts and making public their annexationist terms. Then in its 'Appeal to the Muslims of Russia and the East',

¹ See, in particular, Foreign Office Archives (Public Record Office), Class 371, Files E/3/44 and E/262/44 (henceforth FO).

² Scores of Armenian petitions, citing specific evidence of Bolshevik–Turkish intentions to combine over the Caucasus, were submitted to the Paris Peace Conference and Allied governments. See especially FO 371, File 512/58 for 1919 and File E/134/58 for 1920; FO 608, File 342/1; United States, The National Archives, Record Group 84, Tiflis Consulate, 1917–20, and Record Group 256, Files 184.9402, 184.01602, 861.00, 867.00, and 867B.00. Copies of much of this correspondence are preserved in the Archives of the Republic of Armenia Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, now housed in Boston, Massachusetts.

³ V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (5th ed.; 55 vols.; Moscow, 1958–65), vol. xxxi, pp. 347–8; vol. xxxii, p. 16.

the Sovnarkom promised full cultural freedom to peoples formerly subjected to the lash of Great Russian chauvinism and disclaimed any and all intent of further Russian expansion: 'Constantinople must remain in the hands of the Muslims . . . We declare that the treaty on the partition of Turkey and the wrenching of Armenia from her is null and void.' The widely circulated document, bearing the signatures of Lenin and Stalin, concluded: 'Muslims of Russia! Muslims of the East! On this road to the renovation of the world, we anticipate from you sympathy and support.'¹

In keeping with that appeal, the Council of People's Commissars issued the decree 'About Turkish Armenia', holding forth the principle of self-determination as justification to recall the Russian armed forces from the eastern vilayets.² The Soviet leadership could not have been unaware that the disintegration of the front would lead to the Turkish reoccupation of the Armenian plateau and then to the invasion of Transcaucasia, but the Sovnarkom's evolving Eastern policy required that Russia prove her rejection of imperialistic aims in order to gain the confidence of the Asian peoples and rouse them against the Western powers that were threatening the very existence of the Soviet state.³ Moreover, when the Sovnarkom paid the heavy price to disengage Russia from the world war by yielding to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, it recognized the right of Ottoman suzerainty over all Turkish Armenia, tacitly forfeited the sanjaks of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, and pledged to disperse the Armenian 'bands' operating in the Caucasus and the 'occupied provinces' of eastern Anatolia.⁴

Communists of Muslim birth were utilized to foster Soviet-Turkish relations. Most members of this small group came from among the 100,000 Ottoman subjects living in Russia at the outbreak of the world war and the more than 50,000 Turkish soldiers taken prisoner during that conflict.⁵ In January of 1918, soon after the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, the Commissariat for Nationalities, headed by I. V. Stalin, formed a Muslim subsector for propaganda and agitation. A central figure in the Muslim Affairs Commissariat was Mustafa Suphi (Mevlevizade), a native of Giresun, Trabzon vilayet, who in the wake of the

¹ Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del SSSR, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (13 vols.; Moscow, 1957-65), vol. 1, pp. 34-5. See also Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy* (3 vols.; London, New York and Toronto, 1951-3), vol. 1, pp. 15-17.

² *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1, pp. 74-5, 93-4. See also Hovannisian, *Road to Independence*, pp. 99-101; and for a current Soviet interpretation, M. V. Arzumaniyan, 'Leninskii "Dekret o Turetskoi Armenii"', *Vestnik obshchestvennykh nauk* [Erevan], no. 1 (1968), pp. 23-8.

³ B. A. Borian, *Armeniiia, mezhdunarodnaia diplomatiia i SSSR* (2 vols.; Moscow and Leningrad, 1928-9), vol. II, pp. 175, 259-62, 263, 277, 305.

⁴ *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 1, pp. 121-4, 199-204. See also United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918: Russia* (3 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1931-2), vol. 1, pp. 443, 472.

⁵ E. Ludshuveit, 'Konferentsiia levykh turetskikh sotsialistov v Moskvie letom 1918 goda', in *Vostokovedcheskii sbornik*, publ. of Akademiiia Nauk Armianskoi SSR, Sektor Vostokovedeniia (Erevan, 1964), pp. 174-5.

November revolution was freed from Russian internment. In the spring of 1918 Suphi began publication of *Yeni Dünya* (New World), regarded as the first Turkish-language Communist newspaper, and directed a program to inculcate the message of Marxism into the Ottoman prisoners of war.¹ In June of that year Lenin appealed to the Muslim world to stand with the Russian workers in defending the new Soviet order, and in July, acting as the Sovnarkom's chairman, he exhorted all working Muslims to join into a socialist army.² That same month a number of Turkish prisoners organized into a volunteer unit of the Red Army. In related action, some twenty Ottoman subjects met in Moscow as the conference of Turkish left-socialists, which, in addition to adopting Soviet slogans, elected a standing executive known as the Central Committee of Turkish Socialists-Communists.³

When, after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Turkish prisoners were gradually repatriated, there were those who carried to their native towns and villages translations of the *Communist Manifesto*, *The April Theses*, and other tracts distributed through the Commissariat for Nationalities and its Muslim subsector.⁴ Radical literature also filtered into Turkey with students and laborers returning from Germany and Austria. Some had been exposed to the social ferment in Europe and on arriving home tended to cluster together in a number of leftist societies, nearly all of which were eventually absorbed into the Nationalist movement.⁵ A Communist cell, apparently the first in Turkey, was formed in Istanbul at the close of the world war but collapsed within three months, its leaders either having been arrested or having fled to Anatolia. By mid-1919, however, new Communist-oriented circles had taken shape in the underground of troubled Istanbul.⁶

During this period the Russian Communist Party brought the scattered Muslim Bolshevik units under centralized control. In November 1918 the executive of the Turkish Socialists-Communists was restructured as the Central Bureau of Muslim Organizations of the Russian party and placed under the surveillance of the Commissar for Nationalities and such loyal aides as Mustafa Suphi.⁷ Based

¹ A. M. Shamsutdinov, *Natsional'no-osvoboditel'naia bor'ba v Turtsii, 1918-1923 gg.* (Moscow, 1966), pp. 154-9; Ludshuveit, 'Konferentsiia', pp. 178-80.

² Ludshuveit, 'Konferentsiia', p. 184.

³ R. P. Kornienko, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Turtsii, 1918-1963 gg.* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 11-12; E. K. Sargsian, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i natsional'no-osvoboditel'naia bor'ba v Turtsii (1918-1922)* (Erevan, 1958), p. 46; Ludshuveit, 'Konferentsiia', pp. 184-91.

⁴ George S. Harris, *The Origins of Communism in Turkey* (Stanford, 1967), pp. 53-5; A. Novichev, 'Antikrest'ianskaia politika kemalistov v 1919-1922 godakh', *Voprosy istorii* (Sept. 1951), p. 60; A. N. Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i sopredel'nye strany Vostoka v gody grazhdanskoi voiny (1918-1920)* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 87-8.

⁵ Shamsutdinov, *Bor'ba v Turtsii*, p. 50; Harris, *Communism in Turkey*, pp. 35-6.

⁶ Kornienko, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, pp. 16, 20-1, 25-6; Shamsutdinov, *Bor'ba v Turtsii*, pp. 151-3.

⁷ The reorganization was effected during the first congress of Muslim Communists of Russia, which denounced the 'adventurism' of those participants calling for a distinct

in Moscow until the spring of 1919, Suphi attended the founding congress of the Communist International, there expounding the view that the destruction of the Western colonial powers depended on the Eastern world.¹ The trusted Turkish Bolshevik was then appointed chairman of the Central Bureau of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East, a new executive that operated under the jurisdiction of the Comintern and incorporated affiliates of several non-Muslim oriental nationalities.²

The Soviet leadership followed the postwar situation in Turkey with keen interest. As early as April of 1919, even before Mustafa Kemal departed for Anatolia with broad powers as military inspector general, the newspaper *Izvestiia* characterized the growing unrest in the shattered Ottoman Empire as 'the first Soviet revolution in Asia' and called for the restoration of Constantinople and the Straits to the 'toiling Turkish masses'. The featured article elaborated on the ramifications of the Turkish revolution. First and foremost was its impact upon Armenia and the Caucasus, where counter-revolutionary 'so-called governments' had been set up by the German and then by the Anglo-French imperialists. These hostile states were standing between the 'Russian and Turkish Soviet Republics, which are inspired by mutual sentiments'. The Turkish revolution would make it impossible for those counter-revolutionary creations to trouble any longer 'either of the Soviet Republics'. And it would eventually deprive the Entente nations of the bases from which they were attempting to strangle Soviet Russia. The ripples the revolution had stirred would send waves into the Balkans, Central Europe, Africa, and, in particular, all Asia, where the oppressed peoples were at last awakening from centuries of indifference. 'The Turkish revolution has given us an important ally', concluded the front-page article in the Sovnarkom's official organ.³ With similar expressions, *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, a publication of the Commissariat for Nationalities, declared that 'the revolution is moving to the south, and if in Turkey the government actually passes to the workers, then the fate of the Caucasus can be regarded as predetermined'.⁴ The journal

Muslim party. See Institut Istorii AN Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR – Arkhivnoe Upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR, *Bor'ba za pobedu Sovetskoi vlasti v Azerbaidzhane, 1918–1920: Dokumenty i materialy* (Baku, 1967), pp. 19–25; also Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (rev. ed.; Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 160.

¹ Suphi's report to the founding congress of the Comintern is reprinted in *Pervyi kongress Komintern, mart 1919 g.*, ed. E. Korotkov, B. Kun, and O. Piatnitskov (Moscow, 1933), pp. 244–6.

² Pipes, *Soviet Union*, p. 161. See also Institut Istorii Partii pri TSK KP Azerbaidzhana – Filial Instituta Marksizma-Leninizma pri TSK KPSS, *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi partii Azerbaidzhana*, vol. 1 (Baku, 1958), p. 300.

³ *Izvestiia*, 23 April 1919. See also Alfred L. P. Dennis, *The Foreign Policies of Soviet Russia* (New York, 1924), p. 217.

⁴ *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, 18 May 1919. See also *Bor'ba za pobedu Sovetskoi vlasti v Azerbaidzhane*, pp. 135–7.

also announced that former Turkish prisoners of war in Russia were organizing into partisan units to participate in the Anatolian movement.¹ The Executive Committee of the Third International, hailing the beginning of the Turkish revolution in its May Day manifesto of 1919, called upon the Turkish workers, soldiers, and peasants to form their own soviets and Red armies to ensure victory and then followed with a blistering denunciation of the Paris Peace Conference, among whose intrigues was the plot to partition the Ottoman Empire.² And in September, Foreign Affairs Commissar Chicherin appealed to the workers and peasants of Turkey to defy the 'alien and domestic vultures', to become master in their own lands, and to unite with the proletariat of Russia against the world oppressors.³

The role of Mustafa Kemal's avowed political enemies in preparing the ground-work for a Russian-Turkish alliance was perhaps more significant than the dramatic declarations of the Sovnarkom. A number of scholars have pointed to irreconcilable differences between Kemal and the chiefs of the Committee of Union and Progress (Ittihad ve Terakki) and have ascribed reports of early widespread Ittihadist support for the resistance leader to erroneous and falsified information. United States and British archival materials and the memoirs of the Nationalist commanders themselves show, however, that there was considerable continuity from the Enver-Talât era into the Kemalist period. The Ittihadist (Young Turk) organization, even after its formal dissolution in November 1918, was the only effective force in Anatolia, giving rise to the pioneers of the resistance. Moreover, like so many others in the military hierarchy, Mustafa Kemal, too, had been at least a nominal Ittihadist.⁴ And while he may have regarded Enver Paşa as a dangerous rival, Kemal certainly possessed the political astuteness to welcome whatever aid the former rulers of the Ottoman Empire might bring his cause. Several months before the earliest contact between the hero of Gallipoli and Soviet envoys, Bolshevik agents and Ittihadist fugitives in Germany had already established liaison to discuss strategy for frustrating the designs of the Allied powers.

¹ *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, 5 October 1919. See also Shamsutdinov, *Bor'ba v Turtsii*, pp. 112-15.

² *Manifest, Richtlinien, Beschlüsse des Ersten Kongresses: Aufrufe und offene Schreiben des Exekutivkomitees bis zum Zweiten Kongress* (Hamburg, 1920), pp. 81-99. See also Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents* (2 vols.; London, New York and Toronto, 1956-60), vol. 1, pp. 54-8; *Izvestiia*, 1 May 1919.

³ *Izvestiia*, 13 November 1919; Degras, *Soviet Documents*, vol. 1, pp. 164-7.

⁴ See, for example, Dankwart A. Rustow, 'The Army and the Founding of the Turkish Republic', *World Politics*, vol. xi (July 1959), pp. 520-36, 541-3; Cevat Dursunoğlu, *Millî mücadelede Erzurum* (Ankara, 1946), pp. 58-9; A. A. Cruickshank, 'The Young Turk Challenge in Postwar Turkey', *Middle East Journal*, vol. xxii (Winter, 1968), pp. 18-20. For interesting evaluations by European contemporaries of Kemal, see E. Nicol, *Angora et la France* (Paris, 1922), pp. 20-4; Maurice Pernot, *La question turque* (Paris, 1923), pp. 44-7, 68-9, 99-100.

Taking flight from Istanbul in the waning days of the world war, most Ittihadist central committee members sought refuge in Germany.¹ Allied intelligence agents soon discovered the whereabouts of the Young Turks and warned of a Bolshevik–Ittihadist conspiracy. According to an American official, the erstwhile Turkish rulers hoped that the Communist upheaval would so shake the world that they would be able to regain their positions of power. On its part, the Bolshevik regime wished to use the notorious Turkish paşas in persuading the Muslims of Russia to reconcile themselves to the Soviet system.² Diplomatic and military personnel throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire forwarded similar reports of Bolshevik–Ittihadist collusion and imputed much of the turmoil in Anatolia to the Committee of Union and Progress. A separate file in the British Foreign Office archives traces with amazing detail the postwar activities of the Ittihadist *émigrés*, ironically even as they were officially being sought by the Allies to stand trial for wartime crimes against the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire.³

Not all intelligence accounts were free of conjecture and inaccurate data, but the Ittihadist triumvirate of Enver, Talât, and Cemal paşas had indeed made their way to Germany and were asked by Karl Radek and other Bolshevik agents to continue their patriotic labors in Moscow, safe from possible exposure and imprisonment.⁴ Late in 1919 Talât Paşa wrote Mustafa Kemal that Radek had pledged Soviet support to the movement in Anatolia and that Enver and Cemal were among those who had already set out for Russia. The Ittihadists, Talât insisted, were striving toward a goal in no way contradictory to the aims of Kemal and would apply all their resources to engender a favorable foreign opinion toward the Turkish revolution. The former minister of interior and grand vizier now offered to submit to Kemal's direction. Mustafa Kemal both acknowledged receipt of the letter and commended Talât for his sincere efforts.⁵ Further evidence of early bonds between the Ittihadists and Nationalists lies in the revelation that during the summer of 1919 lesser Ittihadist functionaries who perpetuated the party in Turkey under the guise of offshoot societies recognized

¹ The Armenian press was quick to expose the activities of the Ittihadist leaders in Turkey. See, in addition to nearly every Armenian newspaper, the following Foreign Office files: E/272/44 and E/345/44 in class 371, and 385/1/17 and 385/1/25 in class 608.

² US Archives, Record Group 256, 867.00/87/89/149.

³ See FO 371, file E/272/44. See also FO 608, file 385/1/8; Lawrence Evans, *United States Policy and the Partition of Turkey, 1914–1924* (Baltimore, [1965]), pp. 171–6 *passim*; Ali Fuat Cebesoy, *Millî mücadele hâtıraları* (Istanbul, 1953), pp. 138–40.

⁴ Cruickshank, 'Young Turk Challenge', p. 22; Cebesoy, *Millî mücadele*, p. 42, and his *Moskova hâtıraları* (21/11/1920–2/6/1922) (Istanbul, 1955), pp. 60–1, 158–9, 231–2; Simon Vratzian, *Hayastane bolshevikian murji ev trkakan sali midjev* (Beirut, 1953), pp. 20–8; Omer Kiazim, *Angora et Berlin* (Paris, 1920), pp. 158–62.

⁵ Cebesoy, *Millî mücadele*, pp. 42–3. See also Galip Kemalî Söylemezoğlu, *Basımıza gelenler: Yakın bir zamanın hâtıraları, Mondrosdan-Mudanyaya, 1918–1922* (Istanbul, 1939), pp. 166–7.

Kemal, on Talât's instructions, as the head of the resistance.¹ And throughout the following months Enver, Cemal, Bahaettin Şakir, Küçük, Talât, Dr Nazim, and other one-time Ittihadist central committee members maintained direct or indirect contact with Mustafa Kemal Paşa.²

The immediate Soviet–Turkish Nationalist relations seem to have been channeled through Odessa and the Crimean peninsula, which came under Red Army occupation in the spring of 1919. Mustafa Suphi transferred together with several comrades to the Crimea, there resuming publication of *Yeni Dünya* and establishing the Muslim Central Bureau to work among the unsympathetic Tatar population.³ Soviet historians claim that the appearance of the Red Army on the northern shores of the Black Sea sharply increased the rate of revolutionary ferment in Turkey. Despite the British and French naval squadrons in command of the sea, Mustafa Kemal could take heart in the rapid approach of a potential major ally.⁴ In October 1919 *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* reported that two comrades at Odessa and the Crimea had witnessed the gratifying success of Bolshevik propaganda among Turkish sailors and the spread of Soviet influence toward Samsun and Trabzon on the opposite shore.⁵ The newspaper article probably referred to A. Z. Vinogradov and D. Iu. Gopner, who, as deputies of the Foreign Affairs Commissariat, had met with the Turkish consul at Odessa and discussed the possibility of Soviet–Turkish trade, the Allied naval blockade notwithstanding. Previously, in the spring of 1919, Soviet authorities in the Ukraine had informed Lenin about the creation of a commission to look into commercial relations with Turkey and stressed the need for an experienced person to oversee the project. Lenin marked the passage regarding a veteran officer and instructed Leonid B. Krasin, a minister with responsibilities in supply and communication, to make the proper arrangements.⁶

Even after the Red Army had been expelled from the Crimea by White forces in the summer of 1919, the Muslim Central Bureau managed to function and sent agents to Istanbul to make contact with organizers of the Turkish resistance.

¹ Hüsameddin Ertürk, *İki devrin perde arkası*, comp. by Samih Nafiz Tansu (Istanbul, 1964), pp. 343–4; Ahmet Cevat Emre, *İki neslin tarihi: Mustafa Kemal neler yaptı* (Istanbul, 1960), pp. 242–3. See also FO 608, File 385/1/25.

² Much information about these bonds was revealed by testimony during the trials before the Courts of Independence at Ankara in 1926. A good deal of what then became public had been reported by British intelligence in 1919 and 1920, particularly in FO 371, Files E/3/44 and E/262/44. See also Cebesoy, *Moskova hâtıraları*, pp. 48–60 *passim*, 158–65; Kâzım Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz* (Istanbul, [1960]), pp. 786–7, 794–801 *passim*; Ertürk, *İki perde*, pp. 538–49.

³ Pipes, *Soviet Union*, pp. 184–9; Novichev, 'Politika kemalistov', p. 60; Harris, *Communism in Turkey*, pp. 55–6.

⁴ See, for example, S. I. Kuznetsova, *Ustanovlenie sovetsko-turetskikh otnoshenii* (Moscow, 1961), p. 15; Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Vostok*, pp. 88–9; Mikh. Pavlovich [M. Vel'tman], *Revoliutsionnaia Turtsiia* ([Moscow], 1921), p. 88.

⁵ *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, 5 October 1919. See also Sargsian, *Bor'ba v Turtsii*, p. 47.

⁶ Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Vostok*, p. 93.

One such envoy met with the Karakol society, an Ittihadist successor group that acted as an intermediary between the Nationalists and the Ottoman government and funneled supplies and new partisans toward the Anatolian interior.¹ In discussion with Karakol founder Kara Vasif, the Muslim Bolshevik agent urged the creation of a 'democratic' system in Turkey and offered Soviet aid in expelling the Allied interventionists and upholding the interests of the Turkish workers and peasants. Kara Vasif endorsed the proposals in principle, making it clear, however, that ultimate acceptance or rejection rested with the leadership in Anatolia.²

Meanwhile, Mustafa Kemal may have shown himself receptive to other feelers extended from Moscow. Several sources corroborate an account that during his stay in Havza, 25 May to 12 June 1919, the military inspector general conferred with a Soviet army officer, most frequently identified as Colonel Semën M. Budenny. Traveling incognito on an exploratory mission, Budenny is supposed to have broached the possibility of Soviet-Turkish collaboration against the Allied powers and Caucasian republics. An air of mystery shrouds the particulars of the meeting, the authenticity of which has been challenged.³ According to a rather detailed description of the rendezvous, Budenny gave assurances that Soviet Russia would help Turkey scuttle all efforts to carve from Ottoman territory separate Armenian, Pontic Greek, and Kurdish states. The Armenians, said Budenny, had become particularly annoying, their opportunistic Hnchakist and Dashnakist parties serving as nothing more than lackeys of imperialism. Budenny pledged money, weapons, and even direct armed intercession in return for Turkish defiance of the common enemies in the West. But the envoy also made innuendoes about the establishment of a Soviet-oriented regime in Turkey. Alert to the implications, Kemal replied evasively that only with the triumph of the national forces and the expulsion of the interventionists could Turkey afford to give serious attention to Soviet principles. During their consultations, Kemal and Budenny are said to have developed a cordial relationship, in part due to the fact that the Russian officer had no antipathy toward Muslims, as his mother had been of Kurdish origin. Returning to Russia with a sense of accomplishment, Budenny recommended an active program of Soviet assistance to Nationalist Turkey. If indeed the meeting did occur, Mustafa Kemal proved the shrewder

¹ Tarik Z. Tunaya, *Türkiyede siyasi partiler, 1859-1952* (Istanbul, 1952), pp. 520-3; Rustow, 'Army', p. 540; Cruickshank, 'Young Turk Challenge', pp. 18-19. See also Gotthard Jäschke, 'Neues zur russisch-türkischen Freundschaft von 1919-1939', *Die Welt des Islams*, N.S., vol. VI, 3-4 (1961), p. 204.

² Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, p. 74; Cebesoy, *Millî mücadele*, pp. 94-5.

³ Enver Behnan Şapolyo, *Kemal Atatürk ve millî mücadele tarihi* (Istanbul, [1958]), p. 505; Ertürk, *İki perde*, pp. 294, 324, 338-42, 431, 436. Tevfik Bıyıklıoğlu, *Atatürk Anadolu'da (1919-1921)*, vol. I (Ankara, 1959), p. 64, apparently rejects the evidence of a meeting between Kemal and Budenny, stating that Soviet Russia and Nationalist Turkey were unable to secure direct relations until 1920. George Harris has informed me that his most recent findings indicate that Budenny could not have been in Anatolia in May or June of 1919.

of the two, for he won promises of material aid and pocketed a flexible political weapon. In case of dire need, he could call upon Soviet reinforcements. The resistance organizer confided to a military colleague that the nation must cross one bridge at a time, and that all means were honorable in attaining the opposite shore.¹

Whether or not the Kemal–Budenny dialogue actually took place, on 7 June the inspector general’s staff officer wrote Karabekir in Erzurum that there was much to be gained from an accord with the Bolsheviks provided, of course, that they made no attempt to tamper with Turkish traditions and the Islamic faith. General Karabekir readily agreed and suggested that steps be initiated to ascertain the expectations of the Bolsheviks.² In a cipher telegram on 23 June Mustafa Kemal, then at Amasya on his trek inland from Samsun, revealed his own views to Karabekir. He observed that Bolshevism was not necessarily incompatible with custom and religion, as was borne out in the Russian Muslim regions of the Crimea, Kazan, and Orenburg, but that nonetheless it should not be allowed to spill over the borders into Turkey. A few dependable Turkish negotiators should meet with the Soviets to seal a pact for arms and *matériel* and, only when and if requested, for military intervention. The document could then be thrust before the Allied powers to coerce them to evacuate Ottoman lands and abandon their intent to partition Anatolia. If they did not restore full independence to Turkey, they could then be treated to the spectacle of Red Army units patrolling the shores of the Mediterranean and the Straits.³

While Mustafa Kemal was in Erzurum during July and August 1919 to participate in the historic meeting of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Vilayets, he urged the local notables not to lose courage and drew attention to the heroic Russian struggle against the Western imperialists.⁴ Already having been stripped of his commission by Sultan Mehmet VI, Kemal gained the concurrence of Kâzım Karabekir and former minister of the marine Hüseyin Rauf Bey (Orbay) that although there was no question of Bolshevism becoming the ideology of the Nationalist movement, Soviet Russia must be pressed into the service of Turkey. The basic strategy would require the subjugation of the Armenian republic, the neutrality of one of her sister Caucasian states, Georgia, and the inclusion of the other, Azerbaijan, within the Soviet sphere. Karabekir advised that the best time to strike into Armenia would be when the Bolshevik forces entered eastern Transcaucasia.⁵ The trio agreed that Karabekir

¹ Ertürk, *İki perde*, pp. 338–42.

² Jäschke, ‘Freundschaft’, p. 204, Kâzım Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimizin esasları* (Istanbul, 1951), pp. 58–61.

³ Feridun Kandemir, *Millî mücadele başlangıcında Mustafa Kemal, arkadaşları ve karşındakiler* (Istanbul, [1964]), pp. 74–5; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 57–8.

⁴ Mustafa Kemal, *Nutuk*, publ. of Türk Devrim Tarihi Enstitüsü, vol. III, *Vesikalar* (Istanbul, [1960]), p. 929; B. S. Gafurov, ‘Sovetskaia Rossiia i natsional’no-osvoboditel’naia bor’ba narodov Srednego i Blizhnego Vostoka’, *Voprosy istorii*, vol. XLI (October, 1967), p. 41.

⁵ Kandemir, *Kemal*, 88–9; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, p. 78.

should contact the Bolsheviks by sending envoys over the mixed Armeno-Tatar populated districts of Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Karabagh.¹ Although Armenian rule had been extended to Nakhichevan and Zangezur by mid-1919, General Karabekir had already assigned officers from his 11th Division at Van-Beyazit to lead Muslim partisans in a sweeping rebellion that would force open the corridor from Anatolia to Azerbaijan and Russia.²

Turkish influence continued to permeate Azerbaijan even after the Ottoman armies, in compliance with the Mudros Armistice, had drawn back into Anatolia during the winter of 1918–19. Hundreds of soldiers remained behind to serve in the Azerbaijani army, and many other Ottoman Turks found employment as teachers, civil servants, and militiamen. Even though the dominant wing of Azerbaijan's ruling Musavat party attempted to steer a course that would safeguard the independence of the new republic, the Musavatists had been deeply affected by Pan-Turkish ideologies and could not but treat the numerous Ittihadist fugitives in their country as honored guests.³ Nor could the government prevent the Russian Communist Party from making Baku a center of its activities in the Caucasus. A Bolshevik cadre slipped back into the city with the thousands of returning Armenian and Russian refugees after the Turkish withdrawal in late 1918. By February 1919 the newly organized Baku Bureau of the Communist Party's Caucasus Regional Committee (Kraikom) had begun to woo the small local Muslim Marxist groups.⁴ Kâzım Karabekir's couriers were in communication with this underground throughout the summer of 1919, but the main stream of Soviet–Nationalist relations still passed through Ittihadist channels, particularly through those opened by General Halil (Kut) and General Nuri (Kilgilin), one the uncle and the other the brother of Enver Paşa.

In 1918 Halil Paşa had commanded the Ottoman Army Group of the East on the North Persian–Caucasus front, and Nuri Paşa, leading the so-called Army of Islam, had played a key role in the Turko-Azerbaijani capture of Baku. After the war, British authorities had constrained the sultan's cabinet in Istanbul to imprison Halil and had themselves seized Nuri and interned him near Batum; but with the aid of Nationalist partisans both soon escaped and once again found their

¹ Kandemir, *Kemal*, 89. According to Yunus Nadi the Nationalist leaders attempted without success to send agents over an alternate route on motor launches to Odessa and the Crimean ports. See S. I. Aralov, *Vospominaniia sovetskogo diplomata, 1922–1923* (Moscow, 1960), p. 20; Kuznetsova, *Ustanovlenie sovetsko-turetskikh otnoshenii*, p. 14.

² For the activities of these Turkish officers during 1919 and 1920, see FO 371, Files 512/58, 1015/58, E/1/58, E/134/58, E/262/44; Veysel Ünüvar, *İstiklâl harbinde Bolşeviklerle sekiz ay 1920–1921* (Istanbul, 1948); and documents and accounts throughout Kâzım Karabekir's *İstiklâl Harbimiz*.

³ Extensive materials on Turkish influence in Azerbaijan are included in FO 371, Files E/3/44, E/262/44, and E/59/58, and in the memoirs of the Nationalist leaders.

⁴ For a résumé of Bolshevik activity in Baku and the Caucasus during the first part of 1919, see Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, vol. 1 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1971), pp. 398–403.

way to Azerbaijan.¹ On his eastward journey, Halil met with Mustafa Kemal, who was then in Sivas preparing for the founding congress of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia. Kemal was not pleased with the presence of the renowned paşa in Anatolia and directed Halil toward the Caucasus with the exhortation that he could now serve the fatherland most effectively by securing Soviet military, financial, and moral assistance for the Nationalist cause. In Erzurum General Karabekir supplied Halil with an Azerbaijani uniform and, promising that the Armenians would soon be overpowered, reiterated the urgent need for a firm bond with the Bolsheviks. Halil had considerable difficulty in slipping over the Armenian highlands, but on his arrival in Baku at the end of 1919 he was put into immediate contact with the Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party.²

By that time Nuri Paşa was operating with relative freedom in Azerbaijan, heading the so-called committee for the 'Representation of Turkey by the People' (*Türkiye halk Murahashlığı*), possibly the same body referred to in Soviet studies as the Turkish 'general staff' of Baku.³ The committee apparently maintained a dual existence, obtaining financial support from Musavatist sources while laying plans, in collaboration with the Bolshevik underground, for a coup against the Azerbaijani government. Among the Turkish agents who clustered around the committee was Dr Fuat Sabit, an army doctor who had been one of the organizers of the Erzurum congress. Undoubtedly regarded by Mustafa Kemal as more trustworthy than either Nuri or Halil, Fuat Sabit had been charged with the same assignment given Enver's relatives. In his initial reports from Baku in October 1919, Sabit relayed the welcome news that Bolshevik spokesmen had promised generous financial aid even after they had been told in no uncertain terms that conditions and traditions in Turkey were not conducive to the introduction of communism.⁴

Halil Paşa's first messages, on the other hand, dealt with the critical situation in the vital passage over Nakhichevan and Zangezur. Azerbaijan had failed to dislodge the Armenians from Zangezur, and was recalling most of its military forces to bolster the northern borders against General Denikin's Volunteer Army. As this distressing development jeopardized the underlying Turkish strategy, Halil urgently requested armed support for the Muslim population of Nakhichevan-Zangezur and a military diversion along the boundary near Kars. General Karabekir released limited supplies from the 11th Division, stationed not far from Nakhichevan, but he could not accede to any other of the steps outlined

¹ FO 371, E12472/262/44, report for week ending 9 September 1919; Ertürk, *İki perde*, 203-4; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 185-8; Gotthard Jäschke, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kampfes der Türkei um ihre Unabhängigkeit', *Die Welt des Islams*, N.S., vol. v, 1-2 (1957), pp. 46-7.

² Cebesoy, *Moskova hâtıraları*, pp. 134-5; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 299-300.

³ FO 371, E14638/345/44, report of 7 September 1920, part II; Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Vostok*, p. 100.

⁴ Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 358-9; Jäschke, 'Freundschaft', p. 219.

in Halil's communiqué. The commander of the XV Army Corps noted bitterly that Halil, who had been his superior officer in 1918, had disregarded all entreaties for a powerful drive into Zangezur in order to throw open once and for all the avenues to the Turkic lands of the East. Rather, Halil had embarked on a futile campaign toward Tehran.¹ Karabekir's barb notwithstanding, Halil, together with Nuri and other Turkish officers in Azerbaijan, participated throughout the following months in operations against the Armenians of Karabagh and Zangezur and joined with the Bolsheviks in Daghestan to rouse the Mountaineers against the common menace posed by the Volunteer Army.

Developments in these strategic marchlands were watched closely by the Russian Communist Party. In October of 1919 the Caucasus Regional Committee informed the Central Committee that it was in direct contact with Nuri Paşa and was anticipating the arrival of Halil. It reported in November, through S. M. Kirov at Astrakhan, that talks held with a representative of the Erzurum congress (presumably Fuat Sabit) had culminated in an agreement for united action in Daghestan.² Meanwhile, in Anatolia itself Soviet agents revealed themselves at various locations. British intelligence sources showed that in negotiations between two such envoys and the Pan-Islamic Muvahhidin society in Sivas in November 1919 it had been mutually affirmed that Soviet Russia would recognize Turkish independence and support the elements struggling to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, while the Turkish nation would, as an ally, open the Straits to Russian traffic and adopt such Bolshevik principles as were compatible with Islamic doctrine.³ In a subsequent intelligence summary derived from a different source, it was noted that General Wrangel's chief of staff had executed at Yalta one of the men who had negotiated with the Muvahhidin society.⁴ Moreover, a Russian agent offered Soviet monetary aid to the commander of the 61st Division, Colonel Kâzım Bey (Özalp), in late 1919, and three other emissaries were 'sent by Lenin' to Istanbul at the beginning of 1920, according to corroborative materials in the contemporary British intelligence summaries and in the documents in Karabekir's memoirs published four decades later.⁵ However slight these exploratory contacts may have been, they could not but have influenced Mustafa Kemal's decision to address his formal note to the Council of People's Commissars in April 1920.

The most prominent Soviet official to be dispatched to Turkey during this

¹ Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 413–14; FO 371, E300/262/44, report for week ending 14 January 1920.

² Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Vostok*, p. 96.

³ FO 371, E262/262/44, report for week ending 22 January 1920, and E1428/262/44, report for week ending 28 January 1920. In April the Tiflis Armenian newspaper *Nor Ashkhataavor* published an alleged Soviet–Turkish treaty that included terms strikingly similar to those agreed to by the Muvahhidin society.

⁴ FO 371, E5353/262/44, report for week ending 29 April 1920.

⁵ FO 371, E5738/12473/262/44, reports for weeks ending 6 May and 16 September 1920; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 539–41.

initial period (the reported journey of Budenny excepted) was Shalva Eliava. A Georgian by birth and an active campaigner for the establishment of Soviet order in Central Asia, Eliava apparently traveled across Anatolia to Istanbul late in 1919. In the Ottoman capital he engaged in preliminary discussions with leaders of the Karakol society, particularly with former Ittihadist central committee member Baha Sait and, on achieving general agreement on principles, presumably invited the Turkish notable to complete the negotiations in Baku.¹ On his arrival in Azerbaijan, Baha Sait met with other Turkish quasi-representatives and with the Communist Party's Caucasus Regional Committee, which had already relayed to Moscow two reports about the Karakol ('Karaul') society, its creation, structure, and goals. Then in a draft treaty signed on 11 January 1920 the Regional Committee, on behalf of the Russian Soviet government, and Baha Sait, on behalf of the executives of the 'revolutionary organization Karakol' and the so-called defense congress of Uşak, acting for the 'provisional government and committee of Turkey', pledged the contracting parties to a joint campaign against foreign imperialism and internal counter-revolution in Russia, Turkey, and all Muslim-populated lands and especially against the antagonist states in the Caucasus. Soviet Russia would supply military and financial aid, whereas the Turkish revolutionaries would help the workers of Azerbaijan introduce the Soviet system and would foment anti-British uprisings in the Caucasus, Persia, and the expanses all the way to India. The pact was to take force upon confirmation by the executives of the Karakol society and the Uşak congress on the one hand and the Council of People's Commissars and the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federated Socialist Republic on the other.² Carried to Istanbul by a Soviet officer and then relayed to Angora by Kara Vasif, the proposed alliance, containing unmistakable Pan-Turkic and Pan-Islamic features, was ultimately rejected by Mustafa Kemal, who nonetheless made known his readiness to enter into treaty arrangements on conditions more in keeping with the principles laid down in the Erzurum and Sivas congresses and subsequently embodied in the Turkish National Pact.³ Nor did the Soviet government find the document acceptable. In February, Foreign Commissar Chicherin directed Shalva Eliava, who was once again in Transcaspia, to apprise the comrades in Baku of the decision to reject the 'offensive and defensive alliance with the Young Turks'.⁴ New approaches to the Turkish revolutionary organization would be sought.

By the spring of 1920 Dr Fuat Sabit was claiming to be the main Turkish spokesman in Baku. He boasted that the local Bolsheviks depended on his group

¹ Cebesoy, *Moskova hâtıraları*, p. 60; Harris, *Communism in Turkey*, p. 47.

² Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Vostok*, pp. 96-100; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 615-19, 628-30.

³ *Atatürk'ün tamim, telgraf ve beyannameleri*, publ. of Türk Inkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü, vol. IV (Ankara, 1964), pp. 294-7; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 630-2.

⁴ Kheifets, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Vostok*, p. 101. Chicherin's wire was intercepted by British intelligence and is included in FO 371, E 14638/345/44.

to transmit messages to Turkestan, whence they could be wired directly to Moscow. Yet, in contrast to his initial reports, which had stressed the incompatibility of Bolshevism and Turkism, Sabit's later dispatches revealed that he himself had become enamored of communism. Denouncing the Azerbaijani government for its antagonism to Russia and Nuri Paşa for the strain he had caused in Soviet-Turkish relations by independent action in Daghestan, Sabit now insisted that all Muslims in the Caucasus must embrace communism as protection against Armenian and Georgian imperialism.¹

Although leaders of the Nationalist movement expressed surprise at the tone of these reports, they nonetheless bolstered troop morale by broadcasting news of the Red Army's southward advance and the promise that Soviet aid would soon arrive. In letters to Nuri and Halil, General Karabekir underscored the anti-British nature of Bolshevism and warned that the lifting of a single weapon against the Reds would be regarded as high treason against Turkey. He admonished the influential paşas not to forget that the British were heading the crusade to destroy Turkey and to make it possible for Greeks and Armenians to perpetrate atrocities at will.²

The defeat of the Volunteer Army spurred Nationalist hopes, for Red Army control of the Caucasian passes brought Russia and Turkey much closer to sharing a common frontier. Shortly after the momentous victory of Soviet arms, Foreign Commissar Chicherin is said to have written directly to Mustafa Kemal. Although the unconfirmed communiqué has apparently never been published, British intelligence sources that proved quite accurate in many other instances reported that on 5 February 1920 Kemal revealed to the Representative Committee, the Nationalist provisional executive body, that he was in receipt of a letter from Chicherin heralding the disintegration of the White Armies and the gradual formation of a bridge between the steppes of Russia and the plateau of eastern Anatolia. The Soviet foreign commissar called for a coordinated campaign, with immediate Turkish operations on the frontiers of Persia, Mosul, and the Caucasian Armenian republic. While the Nationalist leadership assented in principle to the proposal, the prevailing sentiment was that, rather than precipitous action, plans be made for a spring offensive.³ Circumstantial evidence supporting the authenticity of Chicherin's letter includes numerous documents, both Allied and Turkish, confirming the Nationalist decision to move against Armenia in the spring of 1920. Moreover, when Chicherin urged the governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan to cooperate with Soviet Russia in liquidating the remnants of Denikin's army, he made no such appeal to Armenia, which had been singled out in Chicherin's alleged note to Angora as an area requiring Turkish 'action'.

¹ Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 491-7, 519-21 *passim*.

² *Ibid.* pp. 523-4.

³ FO 371, E1428/262/44, report for week ending 19 February 1920.

It is of no less interest that on 6 February, the day after consideration of the Soviet proposal by the Representative Committee, Mustafa Kemal circulated a lengthy dispatch to several corps and division commanders, apprising them of his evaluation of the political situation as of the end of January 1920. The Allies, he observed, had been placed in delicate straits by the success of the Bolsheviks in contacting the Turkish resistance, 'because any nation that has so far come into touch with the Bolsheviks has either been obliged to unite with them, socially and politically, or has taken up arms against them to stem the tide of their advance'. The Allies had to expect that the Turks, too, would follow one of these paths. They realized, Kemal noted, that only with great sacrifices, at the very least the return of all occupied non-Arab Ottoman territories, could they hope to turn the Turks against the Bolsheviks, but in fact 'today it is certain that the Allied Powers do not see themselves as yet subjected to such compulsion'. Instead, with the collapse of Denikin's army, the European governments had recognized the Caucasian republics and would try to manipulate those buffer states to isolate the resistance movement. For Turkey, on the other hand, the Caucasus was the only front that could feasibly be exploited to forestall the imposition of a devastating treaty on the Ottoman Empire. In linking with the Bolsheviks over the Caucasus, the Turks could open the flood-gates to Anatolia, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, and India. 'The Allies do not possess natural positions for carrying out offensive operations to shut these open doors. The only place from which such operations can start is Batoum and even here the distance to be closed, from Batoum to the Caspian Sea, is over 400 kilometers, and the Allies will be compelled to be this far distant from the sea.' Hence, the imperialists had plotted to separate the Turks and Bolsheviks by upholding Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Kemal warned that the success of this plan would crush the Turkish resistance down to its very roots: 'Consequently, considering the building up of the Caucasian barrage and the scheme of the suppression of Turkey, we are compelled to have recourse to the last resort to prevent the Allied Powers from building this barrier and to that end we must be prepared to run all sorts of risks and dangers.' These measures, Kemal maintained, should include (1) official and unofficial mobilization and the concentration of armed forces on the Eastern front in order to clear the Caucasus bottleneck and (2) direct communication with the Caucasian governments, particularly those of Muslim Azerbaijan and Daghestan, to determine their disposition and, in case they refused to stand with Turkey, a coordinated Soviet-Turkish offensive against them.¹

Less than a week after Mustafa Kemal had circulated this document, the Representative Committee instructed General Karabekir to negotiate with Georgian and Bolshevik military envoys reportedly sent to Erzurum.² His

¹ Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 465-7; FO 371, E6151/262/44, report for week ending 13 May 1920, appendix L. The date given for the communiqué in *Atatürk'ün tamim*, pp. 180-4, is 5 February 1920.

² FO 371, E1428/262/44, appendix.

brimming hostility to the Caucasian states aside, Kâzım Karabekir cautioned the Nationalist leaders in Angora against a premature offensive, since the Bolsheviks had not as yet moved into Transcaucasia and would be unable to seize control of the Caspian Sea until their icebound vessels in the Volga river were freed in the spring. Nor did the XV Corps commander dare risk a repetition of Enver Paşa's tragic campaign of 1914–15 on the freezing, snow-covered Armenian plateau. Rather, the Bolsheviks should be persuaded that the Muslim masses impatiently awaited the advance of the Red Army and the destruction of the wall separating Russia and Turkey. Karabekir was prepared to undertake preliminary maneuvers in the border districts of Kars and at Nakhichevan, but he insisted that a major operation would first require the opening of a Bolshevik front in Transcaucasia and, if possible, a neutrality pact with Georgia in order to seal the last possible route of British aid to Armenia.¹ In March, after the formal Allied occupation of Istanbul, General Karabekir advised the commander of the 11th Division at Beyazit-Van that the Red Army would press into the southern Caucasus within a month and that the Turkish forces must therefore be ready to strike into Kars, Ardahan, and Batum by mid-April. The 11th Division would capture Igdir at the base of Mount Ararat and take control of the Arax river valley from the environs of Erevan to Nakhichevan, while the 9th Division and the 12th Division would advance over Sarikamish toward Kars, with auxiliary support on all fronts from tribal irregulars and local Muslim councils (*şuras*).²

Throughout the first months of 1920, Turkish agents made their way between Anatolia and Baku in efforts to bring the Soviet–Turkish entente to fruition. Prominent Turkish spokesmen in Azerbaijan, including Fuat Sabit, Baha Sait, and Küçük Talât, even organized the so-called Turkish Communist Party (*Türk Komunist Fırka*), with separate departments for operations, agitation, and propaganda. Declaring itself the genuine representative of the Turkish people and plotting with the Bolsheviks for the overthrow of the Musavat government, the ‘Turkish Communist Party’ gained assurances from the Soviet leadership that Azerbaijan would enjoy an autonomous existence. Only if the coup, which was to be engineered by the Turkish comrades, faltered would the Red Army take the initiative and march on Baku. In its periodic messages to Anatolia, the Turkish circle stressed the importance of a military occupation of Armenia and urged negotiations in Moscow to that end. The Turks and Bolsheviks in Baku, it was asserted, agreed that the Nationalist seizure of Armenia in the name of the world revolution would be a ‘very good thing’. The Russians would indicate when the operation was to begin and would coordinate it with a worldwide propaganda campaign to show that this defensive maneuver was not an act of Ottoman imperialism. The selection of a Turkish negotiator possessing a ‘high character’ and

¹ Karabekir, *Esasları*, pp. 167–8, 178–80, 186.

² FO 371, E4510/262/44, report for week ending 14 April 1920, appendix E.

a solid knowledge of revolutionary principles could be delayed no longer. Baha Sait informed Mustafa Kemal that Küçük Talât and he were ready to depart for Moscow should they be so instructed. Sait Bey labelled Nuri Paşa a fool for selling out to the English-supported clique in Azerbaijan and embarrassing the very delicate relations between Turks and Bolsheviks in the Caucasus.¹

General Kâzım Karabekir, acting as the primary intermediary between Baku and Angora, relayed many of these reports to the Representative Committee with the recommendation that the services of the Türk Komunist Fırka be utilized and that the occupation of Armenia be undertaken to ensure the neutralization of Azerbaijan. He, too, suggested direct parleys in Moscow by an official highly skilled in military and political affairs. On 18 April Karabekir submitted his own proposals for Soviet-Turkish collaboration: the Turkish army would overpower and settle matters with 'imperialist Armenia' and would coerce Azerbaijan into the Soviet sphere at the same time that the Bolsheviks gained sway over Georgia and expelled the English, who were maintaining a large garrison at Batum. And if the Nationalists were to be expected to reinforce the Bolsheviks in their struggle against the major imperialist powers, the Soviet government would have to provide money, necessities of life, and war *matériel*.²

On 20 April Karabekir learned from Halil Paşa that the Azerbaijani cabinet had decided to transfer most of the armed forces, which again had been battling Armenian insurgents in Karabagh, to the northern frontier in a futile attempt to forestall the impending invasion of the Red Army. Halil, who had been in charge of the Karabagh campaign, stated that the Azerbaijani troops were incensed by the treacherous policy of the Musavatists and were ready to fight their way through Zangezur and Nakhichevan if they could be assured of Turkish support and an immediate Nationalist offensive against Armenia. Karabekir was clearly excited by the prospect and advised the Representative Committee that Russo-Georgian negotiations then in progress would undoubtedly culminate in a treaty that would render Armenia totally defenseless.³

Developments in eastern Transcaucasia were already unfolding swiftly. On the night of 27/28 April 1920 a near-bloodless *coup d'état* in Baku brought components of the Xth and XIth Red Armies streaming into Azerbaijan. Ranking Communists G. K. Ordzhonikidze and S. M. Kirov reported to Moscow on services rendered the Soviet cause by Halil Paşa and the Baku Turkish

¹ Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 496-7, 609-18.

² *Ibid.* pp. 632-4. The British 39th Infantry Brigade had occupied strategic points in Baku in November 1918 and the 27th Division, disembarking at Batum in December, had spread out along the Transcaucasian railway system and established headquarters in Tiflis. Because of strong domestic pressures and international considerations, most of these forces were withdrawn in the summer of 1919, and only at the last moment, with the entreaties of the United States government and the urgings of the British Foreign Office, did the Cabinet order the British command at Constantinople to hold Batum for a time longer. The Batum garrison, which always had to be taken into account in the formation of Turkish Nationalist policy and strategy, was finally withdrawn in July of 1920.

³ Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 647-8.

Communist Party (which was soon to be harnessed by Mustafa Suphi and other dependable comrades who arrived from Transcaspia and Astrakhan).¹ The Sovietization of Azerbaijan drew Russia and Turkey nearer still, with only a few Armenian-controlled highland districts now intervening. Hence, Mustafa Kemal's message to the Soviet government on the eve of the fall of the Azerbaijani republic becomes very cogent.

The letter of 26 April 1920, reflecting Karabekir's proposals and constituting the Grand National Assembly's first official act in foreign affairs, acknowledged that Soviet Russia, besides fighting in its own defense against the imperialist powers, was striving to free all peoples subjected to the yoke of colonialism and could thus be assured the collaboration of the Turkish nation. Mustafa Kemal was quite specific with regard to the Caucasus, suggesting that when the Red Army moved into Georgia or when Georgia, acting under Soviet influence, had expelled the British interventionists, the Turkish government 'will take upon itself military operations against the imperialist Armenian government and will affect the Azerbaijani government so as to enter the Bolshevik state union'. Moreover, in order for the Nationalists to drive the armies of occupation from Turkey and then combine with Russia against imperialism in general, Kemal required that the Soviet government provide weapons, food, technical goods, and monetary aid, with the first installment set at about five million gold rubles.²

From the materials here assembled, it can now be clearly established that Mustafa Kemal's letter and Grigorii Chicherin's immediate reply were the consummation of the numerous preliminary furtive, fleeting, and unofficial contacts between the two sides. The exchange of this correspondence opened a new page in Soviet-Turkish relations and introduced the final page in the history of the independent republics in the Caucasus – *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

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¹ İu. A. Bagirov, *Iz istorii sovetsko-turetskikh otnoshenii v 1920–1922 gg.* (Baku, 1965), p. 31.

² *Atatürk'ün tamim*, pp. 304–5; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, p. 667; Jäschke 'Freundschaft', p. 206. Not until the 1960s was the passage relating to action against Armenia published. The letter as previously shown in both Turkish and Soviet publications is in *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, II, 558. It is to the credit of British intelligence agents in 1920 that they secured a copy of the original document, including the proposed action on the Armenian front, and relayed the information to London in September of that year. See FO 371, E 12472/262/44.